



THE INHUMAN RACE

Columbia 'truck' blasts into space

By BRIAN VINE in New York

THE SHUTTLE Columbia blasted into space yesterday on its first commercial flight.

It lifted off from Cape Canaveral with four astronauts and two communications satellites on board. The spacecraft, which is on its fifth mission, is due to return on Monday.

Columbia had aboard the largest number of astronauts ever to leave earth at once—Vance Brand, Robert Overmyer, and scientists William Lenoir and Joseph Allen.

Lenoir and Allen will make the first walk in space since two Skylab astronauts ventured out of their spacecraft eight years ago.

This is the first time astronauts have served as "truck" drivers and cargo handlers in space.

Vance Brand, 51, who returned unconscious from the Apollo-Soyuz mission in 1975 after being overcome by fumes is commanding the mission.

Ironically, Columbia will have a "close encounter" with the manned Russian space station Salyut 7. The two spacecraft passed within 48 miles of each other over the Indian Ocean about four hours into the mission.

NASA officials expected the Russians would have sensors turned on Columbia to pick up whatever information they could.

Columbia's four-man crew had been told of the close pass with Salyut, which is manned by two cosmonauts on a record-breaking endurance flight.



Lift-off... fully-laden Columbia

Arthur slams the door on pit bosses

MINERS' leader, Arthur Scargill, broke off diplomatic relations with the Coal Board yesterday.

And there could be a new pit-strike ballot before Christmas.

The union's executive voted by 16 votes to six to withdraw from consultative machinery with the board, which Mr Scargill believes is a "useless charade."

Talks on pit closure threats will go on—with a possible ballot if union demands are not met.

Girl pupils 'not put off by boys'

GIRLS can learn in classes where boys make passes, two education researchers reported yesterday.

Girls work just as well in mixed schools as in single-sex schools and are not put off by boys being present, according to a five-year survey of 2,000 pupils in northern England.

Mixed schooling is not the reason girls shun science, say Professor Alan Smithers of Manchester University and Dr John Collings of Leeds Polytechnic. They just find it too difficult.

Footballer is found hanged at new home

POLICE yesterday were investigating the death of footballer John Lyons, 26, who was found hanged at his home.

The bachelor striker joined Fourth Division Colchester United last season for a fee of £25,000, and moved into a new home at Old Forge Road, Layer-de-la-Haye, Essex, a week ago.

A club spokesman said: "It is a great shock. John was a good player with a promising future."

Foul play has been ruled out, but a police spokesman said: "We are still searching for a reason why he might have wanted to take his life."

THE Prime Minister yesterday made a statement about the activities of Geoffrey Prime.

In the main, these amounted to 13 years of passing the Russians "information of the utmost secrecy" while he was working at Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) at Cheltenham.

Meanwhile, yesterday's Times carried an appointment advert from GCHQ headed: "An intellectual challenge for Honours Graduates."

In view of what Mrs Thatcher told us, this seems to fall somewhat short of advertising standards — if not actually falling foul of the Trade Descriptions Act.

Far from being an intellectual challenge, Prime seems to have found treason a piece of cake. So much so, in fact, that by 1977, clearly bored to distraction, he left for a much more demanding occupation—that of a Cheltenham taxi-driver.

The Prime Minister informed us that she had decided to refer Prime's pre-cable activities to the Security Commission "to advise whether any change in security arrangements is necessary or desirable."

This rather upset Mr George Cunningham, the Social Democrat member for Islington South and Finsbury.

What did this mean, he



Commons View

by

Keith Raffan

asked. Was it not manifest that tightening up was needed?

The Prime Minister replied that she had wanted to give the Security Commission as wide and unlimited a brief as possible.

This seemed an eminently sensible view to take. Tighten up security at GCHQ and working there might once again become an intellectual challenge, attracting further Prime-like undesirables.

Mr Alan Clark, the Tory Member for Plymouth Sutton, put his finger on the crucial point. Vetting amounted to little more than "amiable interrogation." Any Soviet-trained agent could resist that with ease, sailing through with positive colours.

Indeed, the origins of Prime's boredom with spy-

ing clearly lay with the ease with which he sailed through vetting procedures no less than four times.

Loosening up national security is clearly the answer to all this passing of classified information. Make our secrets easily obtainable and spies will get so little job satisfaction they will all turn to taxi-driving.

In fact, Mr Harry Ewing, the Labour Member for Stirling, Falkirk and Grangemouth, complained yesterday that Prime: "was not positively vetted when he left to become a taxi-driver."

This seemed an extremely valid point.

Vet cab drivers and you would greatly increase the intellectual challenge of their job, particularly to bored spies.



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